

Teaching Philosophy Statement

I find teaching and learning inseparably intertwined: I first stepped into an undergraduate classroom as a student in August 2016, and by December I stepped into the Learning Center as a peer tutor. I realized early on that my joy in education arises through student interaction—I thrive on the energy and challenges students bring, and I use that energy to help students thrive.

But student success takes many shapes. I first co-taught as a classroom-embedded tutor at a community college, where we initially defined success as increasing student pass rates in high-risk courses. Embedded tutoring achieves this goal by flipping traditional tutoring models, which place the burden of seeking help on the student. Such models fail to capture students who lack awareness of resources or time outside of class for tutoring. Instead, I proactively approached 100+ students in 6 classes with feedback, mini-lessons, and conferences. My efforts decreased drop, fail, and withdraw rates, but this definition of “success” did not reflect long-term changes in student retention—73% of students who passed our classes enrolled in the next term, while only 30% of non-passing students returned.¹

These outcomes amended my perspective of a classroom from a bundle of lessons neatly bounded by one semester, to a short-term intervention with the potential for long-term impacts on student success. This motivates how I design, teach, and contribute to teaching scholarship.

I use best practices in curricular development, such as backward course design and the Universal Design for Learning framework, to craft classes that support students with diverse career goals. At Penn State, I designed a new 3-credit course in science communication for Environmental Resource Management undergraduates, who will work in roles ranging from academia to management and beyond. To invite students to express this individuality, I planned assignments that students could tailor to their interests—If I picked the form (e.g., a lit. review), then students would pick their topic; if I picked the audience, then students would pick the form.

When serving as instructor of record, I supplemented such assignments with in-class active learning built on real-world data. For example, students used public surveys to pitch strategies for communicating climate risks to county governments. Students enjoyed working with real case studies so much that, the next year, I added a roleplay using stakeholder and climate data to simulate negotiating in collaborative risk management. I complement these group activities with extended student one-on-one time. For every project, I incorporate at least one workshop where students bring drafts to class, not only for peer review, but for each student to have individual conferences with me. In my Fall 2022 Student Rating of Teaching Effectiveness, 30% of students explicitly named these discussions as a course feature that helped them learn.

Though my main goal is to support students’ success, I still find teaching and learning inseparable—through every interaction with and feedback from students, I hone my own science and communication skills. I use this personal growth to improve iterations of my courses and to further the scholarship of teaching and learning. For example, I recently submitted a sole-authored chapter to the forthcoming *Teaching with Science in the Humanities Classroom*.² Enriched by student insights, I offer the unique view of a scientist leading a humanities class and practical strategies that empower others to do the same.

¹ Smith, T., Barnica, J., Zerbe, A., & Kopp, M. (2019). “Embedded Tutoring: Reimagining the Tutor’s Relationship with Faculty and Developmental Writers.” Panel presentation at Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association.

² Kopp, M. (In Review). “It’s Not All Numbers: Science, Stories, and the Case of Academic Ecology.” *Teaching With Science Writing in the Humanities Classroom*, edited by Lisa Ottum et al., MLA Options for Teaching Series.